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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

20 November 1978

MEMORANDUM

Rhodesia: Another Look at the Patriotic Front

Key Points

- Despite the differences between Zimbabwe African People's Union leader Joshua Nkomo and Zimbabwe African National Union leader Robert Mugabe, the men are not likely to dissolve their Patriotic Front "partnership" any time soon.
- Their relationship currently is under going certain changes and the balance of power between them is shifting closer toward parity.
- This shift could lead to pressures on both leaders to move toward a settlement.

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### Some Perspectives

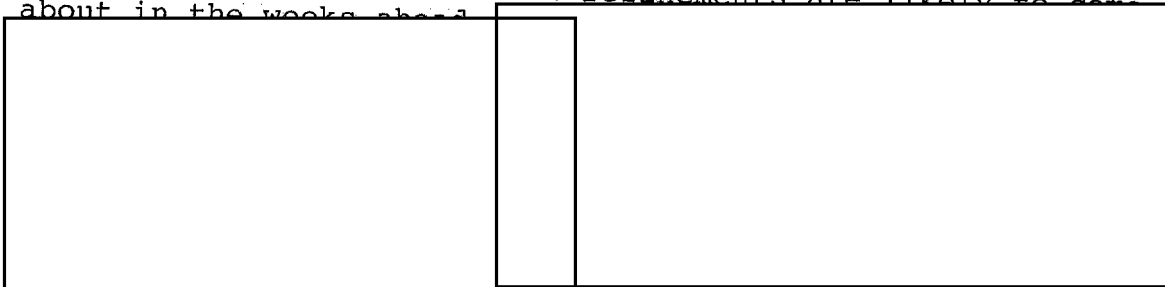
The Patriotic Front alliance of Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe is not, and never has been, an alliance in the conventional sense of the word. The two men agreed to the "partnership" in the fall of 1976 at the urging of the frontline presidents, who were seeking to impose a sense of common purpose on the Rhodesian guerrillas to enhance their position at the Geneva settlement negotiations that year.

Throughout their partnership Nkomo and Mugabe have often taken different political positions, and each has reserved the right to act independent of the other. The two leaders and their subordinates have refused to establish a common leadership structure or to integrate their guerrilla forces, which have clashed on numerous occasions over the years.

Of the two leaders, Nkomo is better known internationally and thus has enjoyed a broader political forum than that available to Mugabe. His links inside Rhodesia, through his own contacts and through those of Zambian President Kaunda, have given him a maneuverability in negotiating with Rhodesian Prime Minister Smith that is unavailable to Mugabe. Moreover, Nkomo's leadership of ZAPU has been unchallenged whereas within ZANU, Mugabe has been forced to share power with the military high command.

### A Changing Relationship

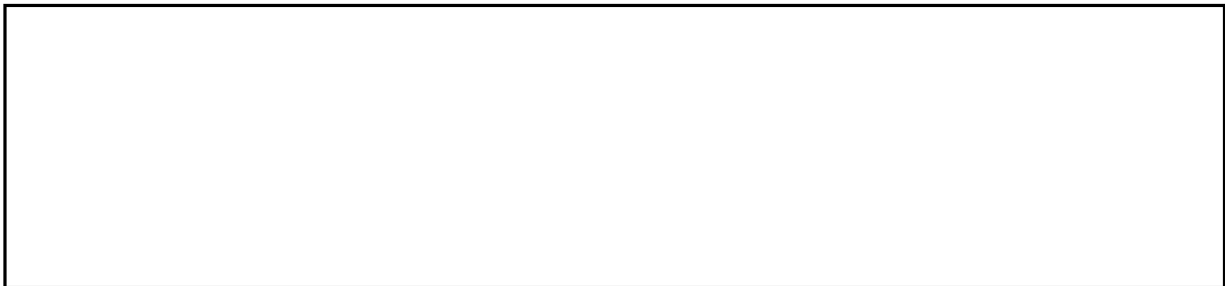
The relationship between Nkomo and Mugabe is undergoing changes, however, and further refinements are likely to come about in the weeks ahead.



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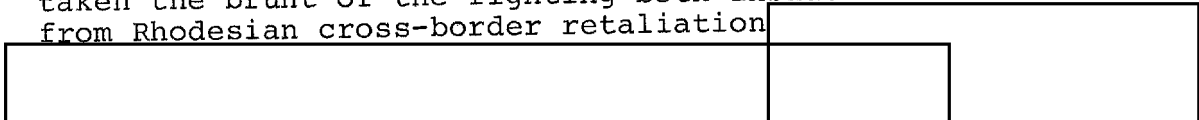
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Recently, however, Mugabe has become more open and less belligerent publicly. Whereas Nkomo has rejected the possibility of further settlement talks because of the recent Rhodesian raids, Mugabe has suggested he might accept such talks. Mugabe apparently senses that Nkomo has somewhat damaged his reputation by his meeting with Smith last August, and he may hope that Nkomo's reputation as a nationalist will further decline if he continues to act independently.



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Mugabe undoubtedly has welcomed the recent escalation of Rhodesian operations into Zambia. ZANU consistently has taken the brunt of the fighting both inside Rhodesia and from Rhodesian cross-border retaliation



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Nkomo has been put on the defensive, although probably only temporarily, by recent developments. The Rhodesian raids have made it impossible for him to talk unilaterally with Smith or to face him in all-parties negotiations without giving the impression of capitulating to the Salisbury regime.

Nkomo also is disturbed by the warming trend in Mugabe's relationship with the Cubans since Mugabe visited Havana last July. Nkomo no doubt senses that in terms of ideology, the Cubans would feel more comfortable with ZANU and the Mozambique government than with ZAPU and Zambia. Thus Nkomo probably fears that Havana's contacts with ZANU hold the potential for a major shift in support on the part of the Cubans, and possibly the Soviets as well.

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### A Look Ahead

Despite the tensions and suspicions that exist between Nkomo and Mugabe, the two leaders are not likely to dissolve their partnership. It has allowed each of them to veto proposals by the other which he deems inimical to his own interests.

At present, Nkomo and Mugabe appear to be more concerned over where they will stand in relation to each other after a settlement than they are in how soon a settlement is reached. That concern could push them, for different reasons, toward renewed talks. Although they would prefer to continue to stall in anticipation of greater concessions from the Salisbury regime as it grows weaker, they also must weigh their relative standings.

Mugabe probably believes that his association with Nkomo has acted as a drag on the tendency toward a separate settlement between Nkomo and Smith. Nevertheless, he may fear that if he holds out too long against an all-parties meeting in order for ZANU to reach parity with ZAPU, and for his own political reputation inside Rhodesia to improve--as it is beginning to do--he runs the risk of being left behind if Nkomo decides on future negotiations with Smith.

Nkomo may prefer to return to Rhodesia with Mugabe rather than without him. Nkomo has concentrated during the past year or so preparing his forces for a conventional military role inside Rhodesia. Once inside he will be in a good position to dominate ZANU, particularly if, as he probably supposes, the Rhodesian security forces would back him up as head of state in any showdown with ZANU.

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Nkomo may decide to push for a settlement before Mugabe has made too much progress in his association with the Cubans and the Soviets. Nkomo's own current visit to Havana probably is designed as much to upstage Mugabe as to solicit new assistance. If Nkomo does agree on new talks, Mugabe is likely to go along; however, he will argue strenuously against any proposals that would seem to favor Nkomo, such as a postponement of elections until after independence.

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